

Conquests for Christ in Congo

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Early Slaving.

The wide, brown mouth of the Congo River was entered by Portuguese slavers before the Hudson River was named. In the year 1484 the first cargo of "ebony" was loaded for the European market. Until as late as 1870 numbers of human beings, reaching as many as 30,000 in some years, were sent to drag out an existence abroad.

Hinterland Penetrated.

An impassable barrier of cataracts, beginning 110 miles up the river, hid through the centuries from the outside world the mysteries of the equatorial regions. Stanley reached the Congo basin from the east, and sailed down the river with his expedition, but was obliged to abandon his canoes just below Stanley Pool. The march around the falls almost cost the complete failure of the enterprise at the very portal of marvellous success, yet, after overcoming fevers, privations, and the hostility of the natives, the worn explorer reached Boma in 1877. All former expeditions perished in the lower cataract region, whence Stanley emerged into undying fame.

Early Missions.

Scientific and commercial organizations were stirred to immediate action by Stanley's famous telegram and his reports of the geography, geology, fauna, and flora of the long hidden interior, and of the accessible multitudes waiting along the river banks to exchange ivory and rubber for cloth and cutlery. The Church of God accepted the challenge of these crowds without Christ, and missionaries of the British Baptist Society reached the south bank of the lower river in 1879. Although less than forty years have elapsed since work was begun in the country, the progress has been great. The true story of Congo missions is more thrilling than any romance could be.

Early Losses.

West Africa is known as the "white man's graveyard," and the Congo as a "lovely charnel house." The bones of missionary pioneers are buried under the waving palms along the jungle trail that winds round the cataracts. The climate declared in that manner that this was not a white man's country. Notwithstanding deaths in all societies at the beginning of the campaign, volunteers came quickly to fill up the ranks, and surely God has brought wonderful victories out of all their sacrifice and labors in a hostile land.

The Mighty River.

The Belgian Colony of Congo is about one-third the size of the United States, and may have 12,000,000 inhabitants. The river rushes into the Atlantic six degrees south of the

Equator, and is seen in its dying struggles two hundred miles out at sea. At its mouth it has cut for itself a channel seven miles wide, and sixteen hundred feet deep. In the Congo basin it drains an area of one and a half millions of miles of fertile territory, and receives tribute from ten thousand miles of allied streams. A railway connects the lower and upper rivers. Other important lines were under construction at the beginning of the present war. There are no roads in the generally accepted meaning of the word, only narrow paths connecting the villages which lie away from the navigable streams. Waterways are the "roads" in Equatorial Africa.

The Language.

The people are of Bantu stock, their customs and religion being alike. A similarity is observed in all the various languages or dialects. The language of the lower cataract region is called Kifoti (**literal meaning "of the black"**) or Kikongo (**"of the Congo"**). This expressive tongue reveals in its wonderful mechanism a far superior constructive brain in the past than that possessed by its present uncultured people. The Bible and portions of it are now circulated over a wide area, and a rapidly increasing number of natives are able to read it for themselves.

Poverty and Wealth.

Modern inventions that have become necessities in civilized lands are quite unknown away from the Coast ports. The commonest

comforts enjoyed by us are lacking in Congo. The furniture of a small grass hut consists mainly of a sleeping mat and a cooking pot. The storage supply of food is but a few ears of corn hanging from the smoke-begrimed ridgepole, and a few parcels of beans and peanuts stowed in baskets fastened in forked sticks on the walls. Food for the pot is taken from the fields as required. Ivory, rubber, and palm nuts are the commercial attraction to the white man. No serious attempt has been made to colonize the country with European farmers, but the Government has given some help to a few families of emigrants to the Kantanga district.

Religion.

Fetichism is the religion of the country. The people are "very religious" indeed. This worship is of a negative sort, a propitiation of evil forces to ward off sickness, calamities, and even death itself. It is a fairly well defined system, having its priests and ritual. A fetich may be an image of wood small enough to be pocketed or as big as the male or female it represents. It may be a pot or a gourd filled with bird feathers, animal claws, human nail-parings, gunpowder, and rubbish of various kinds. The fetich has an occult significance and is credited with inscrutable power for good. It is supposed to prevent accidents, bring success in hunting, insure against theft, and render its fortunate owner immune to epidemics of disease. The true God is known to the Congolese only by name. He lives far

away in a maze of foolish fancies. It is incredible to them that God is nigh, or that He concerns Himself about them at all. And yet death is sometimes laid to the direct hand of God.

Poison Test.

Allied with their religion, or indeed a very part of it, is the poison test for witchcraft. It is said that this wicked practice in Africa is responsible for the murder of at least a million victims annually. The Congo Government has done much to do away with this and other evil habits, but hoary customs are not despatched suddenly by written decrees. Away from the main rivers and much travelled land routes all cruel practices still survive, including even cannibalism.

Mission Societies.

There are several large missionary bodies, British, Swedish, and American, whose stations extend to the far eastern borders of the country. Our own Alliance work occupies a limited territory extending along the north bank of the lower river for about 100 miles, thence north for 150 miles into the Portuguese Enclave. There remains a vast region to the north and west of our established work waiting for us to enter with the gospel message. While we do thank God for the success that has attended our labors, the fact that this region still remains unentered is to us a constant humiliation.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance Field.

Although work was begun by the Christian and Missionary Alliance as far back as 1889, the first aggressive effort in force was in 1892. We now occupy five main stations, namely: Boma, Vungu, Lolo, Kinkonzi, and Mboka. The former main stations of Maduda and Yema are now directed from Kinkonzi, these three forming the Mayombe district. Boma is on the river 60 miles from its mouth. It is the seat of government and our base station. About 250 white officials and traders are located there. Vungu is situated about 50 miles to the northeast, and Lolo about 50 miles farther on in the same direction. Yema is north of Boma about 100 miles, and Mboka is in the Portuguese territory 50 miles away. Maduda and Kinkonzi are only 12 miles apart, about 20 miles in an easterly direction from Yema. A railway from Boma, about 90 miles long, is used in reaching the last named four stations. Missionaries still travel in hammock and on foot to Vungu and Lolo, and supplies in 65-pound packages are carried on the heads of the porters.

Nature of Work.

Generally speaking, we have no industrial or educational work, but confine our efforts on the whole to preaching and teaching the Word of God. If we trained men for trading societies, construction companies, and government service, the Europeans there might grant us a reason to exist. As it is, they feel that

talking to the African about his soul and teaching him to read the Bible is a futile waste of time and good money. We do have the beginnings of a printing plant, and we build chapels and dwelling houses. We are obliged to train our natives for work of this nature, but that is quite another matter.

Other Good Work.

There are some forms of mission work in West Africa, in operation and proposed, that might well drop the word "missionary" and substitute another that would designate philanthropic and humanitarian labors. Such good efforts could be supported by men who do not believe in missions for the propagation of the gospel, and might appropriately bear the name of some individual liberal in giving to their support.

Our Platform.

Briefly stated our present platform is the result of trying out various methods, and has in it only three planks, namely: preaching the Word to all who will listen, teaching all inquirers to read the Bible, and training only teachers and those converts who propose to enter the service of Christ. As regards our own work we are opposed to agricultural-ism, to industrial-ism, to colonization-ism, to educational-ism, and, lastly, to extravagance-ism. It is well understood that "planks" sometimes require changing, and we do not oppose any humanitarian work as such, but we have neither time nor money, nor yet desire to en-

ter into any merely philanthropic plans for the people of Congo. We leave all matters of that kind to others who do not have the burden on them to save men "by the foolishness of preaching," and who hold that the seed of the Word requires a "civilized" heart in which to germinate. In some other places and fields only industrial and educational efforts will serve, it is said, so we can only speak for our own district. Certainly there is a good, better, and best in mission work, and missionaries are constantly forced to choose between conflicting methods.

Services and Classes.

Daily meetings are held at all main stations and outstations. A training school and other Bible classes are conducted for workers and converts. A hopeful feature is that all Christians do some evangelistic work. They go out to nearby villages and into the regions beyond. During the past five years four large chapels have been built, and very little "foreign" money was used. In one case there was not a penny of the total cost that was not given by the congregation. The Christians worked hard in putting up these buildings, men, women, and children making the bricks, sawing the planks, and helping in every possible way.

Truly Transformed.

Is it possible that God can really save people reared in such vile surroundings and guilty of such awful sins? Yes! God does save some Congolese, and keeps them through long years

victorious in His service. The life stories of some of our converts are of intense interest, and their sacrifices and labors are to us a constant inspiration to a more earnest life and to fuller service for the Master.

Late Statistics.

The number of missionaries on the field averages 18, and associated with these are 109 native workers. The total number of main stations is five, and the outstations, 215. For several years the annual number of baptisms was from 200 to 300, but in 1917 it reached 497, and in 1918 the number was 908. The total number of baptisms from the beginning of the work is 3,608. The present active membership of the church is 2,934. Usually there are from 200 to 300 inquirers under instruction who are seeking admittance into the church, but, through the blessing of the Lord, the unusual number of 622 such inquirers is reported at the end of 1918. More than 4,000 pupils attend the day schools, and more than 2,200 different villages are annually reached with the gospel.

Romish Attacks.

The Christians are objects of scorn to their own people, at whose hands they often suffer persecution. During recent times, however, the bitterest persecution has not come from the fetich priests, but from Roman Catholics. So brutal are the methods, and so persistent have been the attacks, that recently the General conference of Protestant Missions has considered taking united action, and making

protest to the British, Swedish, and United States governments. Conditions indicate widespread and serious trouble ahead between Protestant and Catholic natives unless the Belgian priests change their unchristian tactics. Missionaries have been insulted and converts brutally assaulted by the priests. The Belgian people are undoubtedly grateful for all that the countries above-named have done for the relief of the distressed mother country, but the priests in Congo manifest the basest ingratitude, to say the least. Their methods are worthy of the palmy days of Roman barbarism in feudal Europe.

Added Responsibility.

The rich blessing of the past has brought with it added obligations. A well-equipped training school in permanent use should replace periodical seasons of teaching in unsuitable buildings and with an inadequate staff. The native teachers and Christians all need more and constant attention. It is difficult to find time to meet the numbers of converts at outstations who are clamoring for admission to the church, and answers to the many complex problems of a church made up of such people are not easy to find. Old customs and former domestic relationships often appear to perplex us.

Waiting Crowds.

We have arrived at the borderland of a vast, unreached territory where none will enter if we stay out. Away to the north, east,

and west of Mboka are thousands of villages in the French Congo into which a gospel messenger has never gone. Deeply sunk in unutterable degradation, these superstitious multitudes await the uplifting message we hold in trust for them. Living in a present condition indescribably bad, they face, and are passing into, a future unlighted by any ray of hope. They are sinners of the vilest description and need the help that Christ alone can give.

Shall we not make greater efforts to reach them? The time is short before the Lord comes, and their need is so urgent. How thankful we should be that we may all "go" in simple obedience to His last command! We may pray (Matt. 9:38), and we may pay (Matt. 14:16) the expense of the expedition, even if we personally (Matt. 28:19) are not permitted to join the ranks of the army in dark Congo.

Copies of this tract, as well as of others dealing with the various foreign fields of the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the missionary enterprise in general, may be secured FREE by addressing the Free Literature Department,

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